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GRUBS IN MINKS

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In recent years an increasing number of mink ranchers have been reporting heavy losses in their stock from a form of parasitism. The adult stage of the parasite involved is a fly (Wohlfartia vigil) somewhat larger than the common stablefly or housefly and greenish gray in color. In spring and early in summer, when this pest reproduces actively, it deposits live larvae on suitable host animals, where they go through an important part of their development.

Immediately after deposition, these larvae, or maggots, which are so small as to be easily overlooked even in the short fur of a young mink, begin to move about seeking to penetrate the skin. The opening is unimportant as a wound, but when made the grubs begin rapid growth, living on the surrounding flesh, which is rapidly destroyed, and filling the resulting large cavity with their growing bodies.

Affected young minks show an increasing discomfort that is made evident by their frequent cries of distress. Examination of infested animals shows swellings, in the center of each of which is an opening of 1/16 to 1/8 inch in diameter surrounded by moist, matted fur. By looking closely at the opening one can see the moving grub, which may be removed with narrow forceps. Sometimes several grubs may be in the same burrow and then it is advisable to search the cavity after removing one to make sure that all have been taken out.

After removal of the parasites, injection of a mild antiseptic solution into the cavity may aid in the elimination of bacterial infection and hasten healing. Peroxide of hydrogen, or argyrol diluted in the proportion of 1 part to 20 parts of water is recommended.

Repellents applied about the entrance of mink nest boxes have not proved effective in preventing action by the fly. The most effective method of protecting mink kits is by screening the pens. This may be done by covering each pen with ordinary netting, or by screening the entire shed where the mink pens are sheltered. If the original construction is properly planned, mink sheds may be screened at a moderate cost. This can be done to good advantage not only for preventing attack by grub flies, or flesh flies, as they are sometimes called, but also for excluding other kinds of flies that are instrumental in spreading disease.

In the event these parasites make a sudden attack when the owner of the minks is unprepared, it is difficult to install adequate screening without causing greater losses through too much disturbance of the females and their kits. In such emergencies cotton mosquito netting may be utilized, fastened with thumb tacks or pins to avoid the necessity of using a hammer. Some mink ranchers have used this method of protecting their animals with satisfactory results.